

## **Task Force D Meeting Summary**

### **Monday, March 13, 2006**

Participants: Tom Bloomer – Burr Oaks Farm, Elaine Brown – Michigan Food and Farming Systems, Mike Hamm – MI State University (temporary chair), Melinda Remer – Travel Michigan, Robin Rosenbaum – MI Department of Agriculture, Gordon Wenk – MI Department of Agriculture, and Dennis West – Northern Initiatives.

Additional Participants: Getachew Abate – MSU Product Center, Bob Craig – MI Department of Agriculture, Doug Ewald – MI Farm Bureau, Rich Harlow – MI Department of Agriculture, and Jeanne Lipe – MI Department of Agriculture.

The fourth Task Force D: Enhancing Agricultural Viability meeting convened Monday, March 13, 2006 from 2:00 – 4:30 pm at MDA's Geagley Lab in East Lansing. Council Member Mike Hamm chaired the meeting.

Dr. Hamm called the meeting to order, and Kristin Brooks presented an overview of the work of Task Force D thus far, and topics that remain to be discussed in future meetings. The issues to be addressed in this meeting include: 1) increasing the visibility of MI agriculture, and 2) new market promotion.

Jeanne Lipe, from the Michigan Department of Agriculture, delivered a brief presentation to the Task Force about the work of the Michigan Agricultural Tourism Advisory Commission, which has nine members and is housed in MDA. The Commission is addressing concerns in the following three areas: 1) promotion and awareness, 2) signage, and 3) zoning issues. The Commission will issue a report to the Legislature and to the Governor's Office by the end of 2006, if not earlier. One of the main recommendations of the Commission is to create a liaison position within MDA that works very closely with Travel Michigan to focus on ag-tourism efforts.

The Task Force discussed the issue of promotion of the MI agricultural industry and increasing ag-tourism in the state. MFPC staff will further develop this recommendation (D3) and send it to the Task Force for feedback and further input.

### **Recommendation D3: Increase promotion and education around Michigan's agricultural industry and its importance to the state's overall economy and to residents' quality of life.**

- a) The State should take advantage of opportunities to cross-promote Michigan agriculture with public health, economic development, and travel marketing campaigns.
- b) Travel Michigan and MDA should work closely to increase opportunities and marketing for agri-tourism in the state.

- c) The State should increase education about food and food systems in Michigan.

The Task Force then moved on to the next recommendation topic: developing new markets for farmers. There was a brief conversation about the opportunities present in the growing organic industry in Michigan, and about the role of MDA in assisting farmers to transition to organic agriculture if that is what they choose to do. There is no single place for farmers to turn to get information about the transition to organic agriculture.

The Task Force decided that an important component to the recommendation would be a “Michigan Food Summit”, or conference to gather all individuals (buyers and sellers) interested in a stronger Michigan farm together.

MFPC staff will further develop this recommendation on the topic of “new market opportunities” (D4) and send it to the Task Force for feedback and further input.

**Recommendation D4: Develop and support new opportunities for niche/value-added markets.**

- a) MDA should partner with relevant agencies and organizations to identify new opportunities and markets for Michigan’s agricultural products and help producers gain access to these markets.
- b) MDA should partner with relevant agencies and organizations to identify sources of capital and assist producers in attaining capital for new ventures in the agri-food industry.
- c) MDA should partner with relevant agencies and organizations to implement a comprehensive information network to provide services to assist existing and potential farmers in transitioning or entering into new ventures.

The next meeting of Task Force D will again be on the topics of “Land and Infrastructure”, specifically, on stabilizing and expanding the farm workforce, and farmland preservation. The next meeting has not yet been scheduled.